

Best Practices for Doing Evangelism and Discipleship in the World of Sports



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Hi, my name's Mickey Weston. I had the privilege of playing professional baseball for fifteen years and had parts of five years in the major leagues, short career there. But after I was done playing, I came on staff with a ministry called Unlimited Potential, Incorporated, a discipleship ministry in professional baseball. All of our staff are former players ministering to guys in the game. And seven years ago, I became the executive director, but I've also served for the last twenty plus years as a chaplain for the Chicago White Sox. And I've been asked to talk to you today about the best practices of doing evangelism and discipleship in the world of sports.

And so, when Jesus was just about to depart the earth, in Matthew 28:18–20 He said this to His disciples. He says, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I've commanded you; and lo, I am with you, even to the end of the age” (paraphrased). Now, evangelism when we think about it, a lot of times we think about an individual as a project and they're not a project. You know, evangelism is a part of discipleship but the imperative that Jesus gave to us in Matthew 28 was discipleship. Pouring into other men.

And so, I want you to think of it this way. Let's say that you led a thousand people to Christ this year, which it would be absolutely incredible. And for the next thirty years you led a thousand people every year. You would have thirty thousand converts at the end of that time. But let's say that you took a different approach, and you led one person to Christ. And for the next year you met with him and discipled him, poured into him, taught him to observe all that Jesus commanded. And at the end of that year, you split off. So you go from two to four and you kept doing that every year for thirty years. At the end of thirty years, there would be over a billion people reached for Christ. Jesus knew what He was doing

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:18–20 NKJV

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PRAYER

Being
RELATIONAL

Being
AVAILABLE

YIELDING to the Holy
Spirit's Working and Results

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Ephesians 6:18–20 NASB95

Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.

1 Corinthians 4:1–2 NASB95

when He commanded the disciples. It's about multiplication, not addition. And so, what we want to do is that we want to love on those that God places into our lives. And we want to work with those individuals, helping them to become disciple makers.

And so now, to help you understand and to help me to be more organized on the best practices of doing evangelism and discipleship in the world of sports, I'm going to utilize an acrostic called PRAY. And that PRAY stands for *prayer*. Because it begins and ends with prayer. Being *relational*. Being *available*. And *yielding* to the Holy Spirit's working and results.

When we think about prayer, Paul wrote this in Ephesians 6:18–20. “With all prayer and petition, pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak” (NASB95). Here Paul, the patriarch of the Christian faith, or one of the patriarchs of the Christian faith. And he is asking for prayer. Guys, it begins and ends with prayer. Prayer helps to put us on alert. It prepares our hearts as well as the hearts of those that we're going to encounter. Prayer shows a reliance on God to be doing the work behind the scenes. That's with the athletes. That's with coaches, that's with trainers, security, support, people around the ballpark.

Prayer also helps to keep us humble. Tom Roy, a great mentor of mine and the founder of UPI, once told me early on in the ministry, he said that many times your platform will give you an audience, but your humility will give you ministry. And I've tried to remember that. And as I pray for those around me in the ministry that I have, that helps to keep me humble.

It also gives me that boldness that Paul was praying for. It creates a heart of compassion that Jesus displayed with other people. And that prayer helps to make me a servant. In 1 Corinthians 4:1–2 Paul said this. He said, “Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of a steward that he be found trustworthy” (NASB95). And so, as we spend that time in prayer, praying for other individuals and praying for ourselves, we're prepared for that evangelism and discipleship.

PRAYER

Being RELATIONAL

And one of the practical ways that I do that as a chaplain is that I take the team that I have, the roster, and I divide the players up by the five days of the week. And then on Saturday I pray for all the coaches, and I will go and ask specifically from each individual what are one or two requests that I can be praying for them. And a lot of guys will say, Yeah, I'm okay. But some that may not even come to chapel will say, hey, could you be praying for my grandma or grandpa or my mom and my dad, and I'll record that but then I'll follow up and I'll go ask him the next time I see him. And a lot of times that's opened a door for me to get into his life.

And so, it begins with prayer but then it moves to being relational. We have to be relational with those that we're working with. We have to be able to develop those relationships. You know, discipleship is living life on life with individuals. And so, we have to look for ways that we can connect and develop those relationships with multiple individuals on a variety of levels. You know, you've got people in the clubhouse that are churchied, unchurched, that are solid believers, that are babes in Christ, that are non-believers, that are biblically illiterate. You're going to come across individuals like that in your ministry. And so, forming a connection is absolutely critical.

So one of the things that I try to do, I try to learn what are their interests. What are their hobbies? Do they hunt? Do they fish? Do they read? Do they golf? Do they hike? What are some things that they love to do? I need to have a basic knowledge of life on many different fronts in order to be able to connect. And Paul even stated that he becomes all things to all men whereby he might win some. And so, I ask questions about their family, about their kids.

I'm trying to find that connection point and you'll find that it's easier to connect with some than it is with others. You're going to have to work for that connection with many others and a good friend of mine just shared it with me once again, but they don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. And so you've got to be able to relate on many different fronts.

One of the things I do, and I don't encourage you to be a stalker, but you can check social media and find out just some things, some interests that they may have. You need to stay up with what they're doing on the field. I'm a fan of the game of baseball. And so, I keep track of how my guys are doing, but I'm not a fan. They don't need a fan. They need somebody that's going to care for

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RELATIONAL

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them outside of the game. So many times their identity is wrapped up in the game and they need to know that an individual cares for them apart from what they do on the field.

So you're prayerful, you're relational but you've got to be available to them. These athletes don't work a nine-to-five job. And in ministry you will not work a nine-to-five job. You're going to need to be flexible with your hours. Yes, you have to have boundaries. But because of, for me, the games, a lot of the games are late at night. I may get a call at 11 o'clock and I have to be available for that at times. Or I may get a call early in the morning, but I want to make sure that I am available to them.

When I set up meetings with the players, I try to set up meetings away from the field, try to be in a more relaxed environment with them. And if I do set up a meeting, if I've set up the meeting and I ask them to meet me for coffee or for lunch, I'm going to pick up the check. Too many times I've seen in ministry where someone that is in ministry has what we call alligator arms. And they can't quite reach their wallet. That cannot be us. It builds trust when we are willing to pick up the check, when we've made the invitation for the guy to meet with us. And we can, when we're available to them, we can celebrate their accomplishments, but also be present in the tough times. A lot of times in the game people avoid those that are going through rough streaks, but we need to be available to them in case they want to talk.

And lastly, I want to encourage you to yield to the Spirit's working and the results. Okay? That's a hard thing. We live in a numbers-driven society and people want to know, okay, how many hands were raised? But that's not how we should be looking at ministry and in the sports world. You need to release your expectations to the Spirit's control. We don't control the numbers. I can't control a man's heart. I need to be trusting and praying that the Spirit is working on the heart of the individuals that I'm around. People will grow at a different pace. Some grow quickly, some grow slowly. And I need to adjust my expectations for that.

But you need to faithfully prepare for many, for one, or for none. There's been many times where I've showed up and nobody else has showed up, but I still keep showing up. The key is that I want to pour into or find a couple key men that I can pour into and let them pour into the rest of the team because they live with them 24/7.

PRAYER

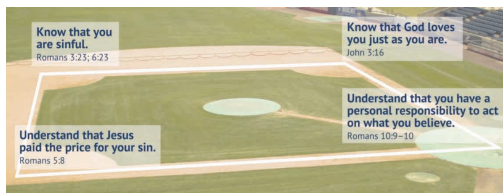
Being
RELATIONAL

Being
AVAILABLE

YIELDING to the Holy Spirit's Working and Results

Effective Evangelism:

Sharing Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit leaving the results to God.



A good friend of mine, Norm Evans, played in the NFL as an offensive lineman. And he ran a ministry called Pro Athletes Outreach. And many years ago, as a young believer, he shared with me a definition of effective evangelism. He said effective evangelism is sharing Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, leaving the results to God. We're not in control of that but we can share the gospel and share it clearly. And that's one of the things I've tried to do, is to learn an effective way that I can communicate the gospel.

A lot of times we're at a ball field, I'll take people around the bases, because our God is a God of order and we must hit first base, second base, third and home. Getting to first base, you need to know that God loves you just as you are—John 3:16. To get to second base, know that you're sinful, sinfully separated from a holy God—Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23. To get to third base, understand that Jesus paid the price for your sin. It's Romans 5:8. In order to get home, we've got to understand that we have a personal responsibility. Faith is an action verb. We have to take action on what we believe, and that's Romans 10:9–10.

But find an effective way that you can communicate the gospel, memorize the verses and utilize that as God brings people into your path. There are some other materials that I've utilized in the discipleship process. One of my favorites is *The Navigators 2:7 Program*. It's three books: *Growing Strong in God's Family*, *Deepening Your Roots*, and *Bearing Fruit*. And it's just a very effective way to disciple somebody. Francis Chan has *Multiply*. There's *30 Days to Understanding The Bible*, one of my favorite Bible study books. Cru has a lot of materials out there, but when you're considering evangelism discipleship, it begins with and ends with prayer. And understand this, if God has called you to this, He will equip you.